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THE RELIGION OF THE POST-EXILIC PROPHETS.

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IN order to understand the religion of post-exilic times we must call to mind the conditions that prevailed before the exile. In the time of Isaiah two great religious parties were struggling for the mastery. The first we may call the traditional, or orthodox, party. It included the mass of the people of Judah, the aristocracy, and the priesthood. Its adherents worshiped Yahweh as the national god of Israel. They regarded him as a tutelary deity, who was bound to his people by ties of natural kinship. Between him and his worshipers there existed a covenant, in virtue of which he was bound to defend them, provided they rendered him his proper tribute. His feasts must be kept up with regularity and splendor, numerous sacrifices must be offered on his altars, firstlings and first-fruits must be devoted to him.

The idea that he made any moral demands was generally repudiated. Immorality was universal. The ruling classes oppressed the poor with the utmost cruelty; the judges were venal; the priests were corrupt, and the common prophets gave favorable oracles in proportion to the pay that they received.

From a Yahweh-worship of this type it was but a short step to ordinary Semitic heathenism. Yahweh had early been identified with Baal, and the old high-places of the Baals, with their accessories of pillars and sacred trees, had been adopted as seats of his worship. Close contact with the Assyrians, from the days of Ahaz onward, encouraged a further syncretism. Manasseh went all lengths in the attempt to blend the religion of Israel with the religions of the neighboring nations (2 Kings 21: 2-9; 23: 4-14; Jer. 15: 4). Judah was full of foreign cults and foreign heathenish customs. Images were used everywhere in the worship of Yahweh. Thus the religion of Israel as held

by the popular party was in danger of losing its distinctive features and being absorbed in the chaos of religions that filled western Asia.

Over against the traditional party stood the reforming, or prophetic, party. It aimed at the removal of foreign cults from Judah and of foreign elements from the religion of Yahweh. It antagonized foreign alliances as likely to lead to increased syncretism. It saw that the sole distinction of the religion of Israel from other religions lay in its ethical conception of Yahweh. If this ethical element were ignored, there would be nothing to distinguish Yahweh from any of the patron gods of other nations, and the door would always be open to syncretism with other religions. Accordingly, they insisted that Yahweh must not be conceived as a tutelary deity like Baal, but as "the Holy One of Israel," and that the homage which he requires is not ritual, but righteousness. They declared also that, unless Judah repented and reformed, Yahweh would not spare it, but would give it up to the same fate that befalls other nations. This was the standpoint of the older prophecy, as exemplified in Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah; but in the century after Micah, prophecy began to decline from this lofty theology.

The effect of Manasseh's persecution was seriously to thin the ranks of the prophetic party. The leaders such as Isaiah, and possibly also Micah, fell victims to the king's wrath; and the survivors were men of less clearness of vision and less intensity of faith. They began to feel that the ideals of their great masters, Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah, had been set too high, and that it was necessary to yield somewhat to the prejudices of the common people, if they were to be won over to the prophetic program of reform. In this sentiment they were met half-way by the priests and the better men in the old national party, who were disgusted with the extreme heathen reaction of Manasseh, and were touched with pity for the sufferings of the adherents of the prophetic party. The moderate men on both sides felt that the need of the nation was a compromise, by which the extremes, both of the prophets and of Assyrian sympathizers like Manasseh, should be avoided. They desired a religion that

should hold up the prophetic ideals of loyalty to Yahweh and righteousness of life, and at the same time should preserve the less objectionable elements of the ancient ritual.

The fruit of this movement for compromise was the book of Deuteronomy (4 : 44 — 29 : 1). This book makes its first appearance in history in the discovery of the law-book in the temple in the eighteenth year of King Josiah. The narrative of 2 Kings, chaps. 22, 23, gives so full an account of the contents of this code, and of the reforms that were based upon it, that there is no room for doubt that it was Deuteronomy, and Deuteronomy only. Theology and historical standpoint alike indicate that it cannot have been written long before its discovery in the temple.

A few critics assign the writing of this book to the latter part of the reign of Hezekiah, but the majority prefer the reign of Manasseh, both on account of the compromise-spirit that the book displays, and because the sins that it singles out for special condemnation, such as star-worship, sacrifice of children, and sorcery, are those of which Manasseh in particular was guilty. The demand that all worship shall be centralized at Jerusalem clearly implies a time after the fall of the other sanctuaries during the Assyrian wars and the escape of Jerusalem in 701.

On one side, Deuteronomy is a compendium of prophetic doctrine. It declares that Yahweh is the only true God, and that all foreign cults and all foreign elements in the worship of Yahweh must be put away. It antagonizes foreign alliances as likely to lead to religious syncretism. It is opposed to the high-places because of their connection with Canaanitish Baal-worship. It teaches that the supreme characteristic of Yahweh, which distinguishes him from all other gods, is his righteousness, and insists that he demands righteousness of men. Following the example of Hosea, but greatly developing and elaborating his doctrine, it presents the love of Yahweh under the figure of a marriage union, and speaks of apostasy as "going whoring after other gods." With an eloquence that is surpassed by none of the prophets, it sums up righteousness in God and in man as the expression of love. In 6 : 4, 5 it gives an abstract of prophetic theology from Amos to Isaiah in the words : "Hear O Israel, Yahweh our God,

Yahweh is one: and thou shalt love Yahweh thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy might." This utterance was singled out by later Judaism as its confession of faith, and Jesus declared that it was the great commandment of the law and the condition of eternal life (Matt. 22: 37 f.; Mark 12: 29 f.; Luke 10: 27 f.).

On the other side, Deuteronomy is a compendium of the ritual of ancient Israel. It repudiates the high-places, but it does not do away with sacrifice. The sanctuary at Jerusalem it retains as a place of sacrifice for the entire nation. All the offerings known to the earlier codes of J and E are preserved, and others are added that had grown up since those codes were written. Deuteronomy seeks, however, to give the sacrifices a symbolic spiritual meaning so as to make them a more adequate expression of the prophetic religion, and repeatedly insists that the poor, the widow, and the orphan shall be invited to the sacrificial meal, so that it may become an opportunity for the grace of charity. The ancient holy days are all retained, but they are cut loose from naturistic and agricultural associations, and are made commemorations of Yahweh's historic deliverances of Israel. Thus the old national ritual that the great prophets had rejected was continued, but the effort was made to lift it into the sphere of prophetic thought and to transform it by the infusion of prophetic ideals. Deuteronomy, accordingly, is neither an expression of the pure prophetic theology, nor is it a reflex of the old popular religion of Israel, but it is a union of the two. It is a compromise, similar to that which early Christianity made in combining the spiritual and ethical teachings of Jesus with the sacerdotal and sacrificial conceptions of Judaism and of heathenism. Just as the Catholic church is a compromise between Christianity and ritualism, so Judaism is a compromise between prophetism and the old popular religion. The foundation for this compromise was laid by Deuteronomy, which thus marks the beginning of the Judaic period of the Old Testament religion.

Through this compromise the prophetic party succeeded in winning the adhesion of the priests and of the better men among the nobles when this book was published in 619 B. C., and they

were able to carry through the reformation of Josiah. But, although temporarily successful, they paid a heavy price for their success, since the Deuteronomic compromise resulted in the speedy extinction of prophecy. Compromise always gives an advantage to the inferior side. Whenever Christianity has compromised with heathenism, heathenism—not Christianity—has reaped the advantage. So also the Deuteronomic compromise resulted ultimately in the triumph of ritualism and the extinction of prophecy. Jeremiah is the last prophet of the old ethical school.

In no characteristic does post-exilic prophecy differ more widely from pre-exilic prophecy than in its lack of the ethical element. The earlier prophets were primarily preachers of righteousness. Amos 7:16, "prophecy unto Israel," is defined in the parallel clause as "utter a word against the house of Isaac." Micah 3:8 declares: "Truly I am full of power by the spirit of Yahweh . . . to declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin." Jeremiah sums up the mission of all his predecessors in the words: "Yahweh hath sent unto you all his servants the prophets, rising early and sending them . . . saying turn ye now everyone from his evil way and from the evil of your doings." In contrast to this the post-exilic prophets brought no call to repentance, but were rather promoters of the ritual and predictors of the coming glory of Judah.

The transition from the old type of prophecy to the new is seen in Ezekiel. From the moment that Jerusalem fell and the captivity of the nation was complete, the tone of Ezekiel's preaching changed entirely. Up to that time he had announced the divine judgment upon a sinful nation, quite in the spirit of the earlier prophets; but after that time he ceased denunciation and devoted himself exclusively to consolation and prediction of restoration (chaps. 33-48). In chaps. 40-48 of his book he goes so far as to lay down an elaborate plan for the rebuilding of temple and the re-establishing of its ritual.

Deutero-Isaiah does, indeed, pronounce woes upon the apostate portion of Judah, but for the nation as a whole he has only encouragement and promise. The keynote of his book is struck

in the opening words: "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye to the heart of Jerusalem, and cry unto her that her time of service is accomplished, that her punishment is accepted, that she hath received of Yahweh's hand double for all her sins" (Isa. 40: 1 f.). Accordingly, his message is not one of doom, but of hope: "The captive exile shall speedily be loosed" (51: 14).

Haggai finds nothing to criticise in the little community at Jerusalem, except that it has not completed the temple; and when this work is resumed, his outlook into the future is wholly optimistic.

Zechariah stands upon exactly the same theological ground. Nowhere does he speak of the restored Judah as sinful, or represent the Lord as angry with it. It is the fathers who were sinful and who brought down God's wrath upon them. "They refused to hearken and turned a stubborn shoulder, and made their ears deaf that they should not hear. Yea, they made their hearts like adamant, lest they should hear the instruction and the words which Yahweh Sebaoth sent by his spirit by the hand of the former prophets: therefore came there great wrath from Yahweh of hosts" (7: 11 f.). Similarly in 1: 4-6 the fathers would not receive the word which came by the former prophets, and, therefore, judgment came upon them. In 1: 15 the prophet brings the word of the Lord, "I *was* angry a little" with Judah. Here the tense is significant, as showing that it is not with the present generation, but with its forefathers, that Yahweh was displeased, and even with them he was angry only "a little." This last expression is characteristic of Zechariah's optimistic view of the moral character of Judah.

Not against Judah, but against the heathen, is Yahweh angry. "I am very sore displeased with the nations that are at ease, for I was angry but a little, but they helped for evil" (1: 15). "They that go to the north country give vent to my wrath against the north country" (6: 8).

Upon Judah Yahweh looks with favor only. "I am zealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great zeal" (1: 14). "Thus saith Yahweh unto the nations that plunder you, . . . He that

smiteth you smiteth the apple of his eye" (2:12 [Heb.]). "Thus saith Yahweh Sebaoth, I am zealous for Zion with a great zeal, and I am zealous for her with a great fury. Thus saith Yahweh, I have returned unto Zion and have taken up my abode in the midst of Jerusalem" (8:2, 3). "But now [*i. e.*, since the rebuilding of the temple has begun] I will not be unto the remnant of this people as in the former days" (8:11). Most striking of all for disclosing the conception of Zechariah is 8:14 f.: "Thus saith Yahweh Sebaoth, As I thought to do evil to you, when your fathers provoked me to wrath, saith Yahweh Sebaoth, and I repented not, so again I have thought in these days to do good unto Jerusalem and to the house of Judah; fear ye not."

With this conception of the attitude of God toward Judah there was no occasion for a call to repentance, and, consequently, Zechariah did not utter it. The repentance of Judah had already taken place in exile (1:6). Repentance was the message of the "former" prophets (1:4; 7:12), but now the message of the prophets is: Build the temple, and believe the predictions of the glory that is presently to be revealed (8:9 f.).

Corresponding to the absence of the preaching of righteousness in Zechariah is the optimism of his outlook into the future. Unlike the earlier prophets, he sees no impending day of judgment, from which only a remnant shall escape, but only victory, peace, and blessedness for his people; *cf.* 1:16 f., the temple shall be completed, Jerusalem shall be rebuilt, and the towns of Judah shall overflow with prosperity; 2:4 (Heb.), the heathen powers that have injured Judah shall be destroyed; 2:8-17 (Heb.), Jerusalem shall have no need of a wall; when the power of the heathen is broken, she shall fear no attack, for Yahweh himself will be a wall of defense to her; the exiles shall return from Babylon, many nations shall turn to Yahweh, and Jerusalem shall be the center of God's rule on earth; 3:7-10, Joshua, the high-priest, shall enjoy a mediatorial function like that of the angels; his presence in Jerusalem is a sign of the speedy coming of the Messiah; a gem with seven facets, which has been deposited with Joshua as an ornament for the coming king, shall soon have the name of its owner (Zerubbabel, *cf.* 4:9; 6:12)

engraved upon it; then the golden age shall begin; 4:6-10a, Zerubbabel is promised that he shall finish the temple; 6:10-15, a crown is to be made and to be laid up for the Messiah, who is presently to appear and to finish the temple; then the Jews that are far away shall return and help to beautify the temple; 8:2-15, the land shall again be full of inhabitants, the exiles shall return from all lands, Judah shall be blessed with boundless prosperity.

This brief survey makes it clear that Zechariah has no thought of sin in Judah and no anticipation of judgment upon her. Consequently, he cannot in any sense be called a preacher of righteousness like the older prophets. A few passages in the book of Zechariah that apparently contradict this generalization, upon closer examination really confirm it. In 1:1 f. and 7:8 f., which seem to contain a call to repentance, are not found the words of Zechariah, but allusions to the message of "the former prophets." In 3:9b the "iniquity" of the land is to be removed, but the context shows that עֲוֹן has here the sense of "penalty," not "guilt," as in Exod. 20:5; 34:7. In 5:3 the curse is one that goes forth, not upon Judah, but upon the heathen world, and the iniquity mentioned in vs. 6 is the iniquity of the heathen, not of Judah. The following evil that is put in the ephah measure and carried off is not the sin, but the misfortune, of Judah.

It remains true, therefore, that Zechariah's sole aim, like Haggai's, was to incite the Jews to complete the temple. He tells them that they cannot expect the divine favor until Yahweh is glorified in his temple. The old prophetic doctrine, "I desire mercy and not sacrifice," is forgotten. Malachi likewise preaches: "Bring ye the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be meat in my house, and prove me now herewith, saith Yahweh of Hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it."

With the loss of their moral enthusiasm, and consequent loss of a message, the guilds of the prophets of necessity began to lay emphasis upon that which hitherto had been only a minor

phase of their ministry, namely, the gathering and the preservation of written records. Their one aim now was to save all that could be collected of the fragments of the older literature that had survived the destruction of Jerusalem, and to combine these into books for religious edification. To their labors we owe the Deuteronomic compilation of the Hexateuch, and also the gathering of the ritualistic material in the Priestly Code. They composed the Deuteronomic histories of the pre-exilic period, and they also gathered the surviving fragments of the prophets. Subsequently they combined the Priestly Code with the existing pentateuchal material and gave the finished Pentateuch canonical authority. Then they formed the official collections of the former and latter prophets, and placed them as canonical authorities alongside of the Pentateuch. Unlike the ancient prophets, they were conscious of no voice of God speaking within and giving them a message for their generation. They lived in the past, and their ambition was to reconstruct its history and its observances, and to put them into practice.

Thus the ancient guilds of the prophets changed by degrees into the guilds of the scribes. They were the lineal descendants of the prophets, and inherited their zeal and their influence over the people, but in every other respect they were unlike their predecessors. Their faces were set backward rather than forward, and their teaching was the written law rather than the living word of God in their souls. Through their influence Israel became what it has been ever since, the "people of the book."

A typical representative of early scribism is Ezra. If he had lived at an earlier period, his enthusiasm and his energy would have made him one of the greatest of the prophets; but, living when he did, he became merely the greatest of the doctors of the law. His standing designation in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah is Ezra, the scribe. Of him it is said in Ezra 7:7, 10f., that he was a ready scribe in the law of Moses which Yahweh, the God of Israel, had given, and that he had set his heart to seek the law of Yahweh, and to do it, and to teach it. Here we have expressed the three main aims of scribism; to ascertain

the correct ancient law, to put it into perfect practice, and to teach others to observe it.

By the time of Ezra ritualism had triumphed over the ethical, spiritual religion of the prophets. The ancient religion of Israel and the religion of the prophets had disappeared, and Judaism, a compromise system built up out of elements of both the earlier religions, had come into being. The Deuteronomic compromise had yielded its legitimate fruit in the extinction of the highest religious thought of the Old Testament. The voice of genuine prophecy was silenced for four centuries, until John the Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth appeared preaching once more the message of the pre-exilic prophets: "Repent ye, for the kingdom of God is at hand."